NAXOS
A Guided Tour of
Nationalism in the
Romantic Era
Volume 7

SMETANA, BEDŘICH (1824–1884)

1 The Bartered Bride, I. Overture
2 Má vlast (My Fatherland), No. 1. Vyšehrad
3 String Quartet No. 1 in E minor, 'From my Life', I. Allegro vivo – Appassionato
4 From My Homeland, No. 1 in A major: Moderato

DVOŘÁK, ANTONÍN (1841–1904)

5 Rusalka, Op. 114, Act I: O Silver Moon, 'Song to the Moon'
6 Stabat Mater, Op. 58, B. 71, I. Stabat mater dolorosa
7 Symphony No. 6 in D major, Op. 60, B. 112, I. Allegro non tanto
8 Symphony No. 7 in D minor, Op. 70, B. 141, I. Allegro maestoso
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10 Symphony No. 9 in E minor, Op. 95, 'From the New World', I. Adagio – Allegro molto
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19 Romance for Violin and Orchestra in F minor, Op. 11
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25 8 Humoresques, Op. 101, B. 187, No. 3. Poco andante e molto cantabile in A flat major
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GRIEG, EDVARD (1843–1907)

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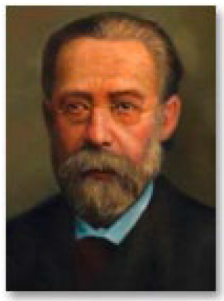
49 Lyric Pieces, Book 9, Op. 68, Badnlat (Cradle Song)
50 Lyric Pieces, Book 10, Op. 71, Småtrold (Puck)



SMETANA, BEDŘICH (1824–1884)

Smetana holds an important place in the development of musical nationalism in his native Bohemia, where he was born in 1824. He showed early promise and wrote his first compositions at the age of nine. By 1843 he was supporting himself in Prague by teaching the piano. Smetana remained committed to Czech nationalism throughout his career, though it was interrupted by a period of self-imposed exile in Sweden after the political turmoil of 1848. After returning to Bohemia he began composing music for theatre, which included *The Bartered Bride* and *Dalibor.* He eventually became principal conductor of the Czech Provisional Theatre, but he had his enemies, and calls grew for his dismissal from the theatre. In 1874 he was forced to take a leave of absence as a result of his increasing deafness. In spite of this, he completed the opera *The Kiss* in 1876 and *The Secret* two years later. In 1881, at the opening of the new National Theatre, his opera Libuse was staged, while he continued to work relatively slowly on his opera *The Devil's Wall*. His health continued to deteriorate, with intermittent loss of memory and of speech. He died in May 1884, in an asylum in Prague.

OPERA (Track 1)
Smetana blazed a trail in his establishment of distinctively Czech opera. He wrote eight of them in all, though by far the best known is *The Bartered Bride*, the overture of which makes a brilliant opening to any orchestral concert programme. Sadly, his other operas have enjoyed less international success.

ORCHESTRAL MUSIC (Track 2)
By some margin, the most popular of Smetana's orchestral works is the cycle of symphonic poems *Má vlast* ('My Country'). The work comprises six movements, of which 'Vltava' ('River Moldau'), which follows the historic course of the river as it flows towards Prague, is the most frequently heard. He also composed other symphonic poems, overtures and a 'Festive' Symphony.

CHAMBER MUSIC (Tracks 3-4)
Smetana wrote two string quartets, the first with the title 'From My Life'. There is a G minor Piano Trio and two short pieces for violin and piano under the title *From My Homeland*.

DVOŘÁK, ANTONÍN (1841–1904)

The later nineteenth century brought an increasing consciousness of national identity to various ethnic groups in Europe and elsewhere in the world. Antonín Dvořák, born in a Bohemian village where his father was an innkeeper and butcher, followed Smetana as the leading exponent of Czech musical nationalism, and was firmly rooted within the Classical traditions of Central Europe. His early musical training was followed by employment for some years as a viola player, for a time under Smetana, and then, with the positive encouragement of Brahms, by a life primarily devoted to composition. Dvořák won recognition abroad and between 1892 and 1895 he spent some time in the United States of America as director of the new National Conservatory. This period brought compositions which combine American and Bohemian influence. The musical results of Dvorák's time in America lie chiefly in his own music, notably in his Symphony 'From the New World', his American Quartet and American Quintet and his Violin Sonatina, works that rely strongly on the European tradition that he had inherited, while making use of melodies and rhythms that might be associated in one way or another with America. By 1895, Dvorak had returned to Prague, where he remained until his death in 1904.

OPERA (Track 5)
Dvořák wrote 10 operas, the first in 1870 and the last completed and staged in 1903. *Rusalka,* first produced in 1900, provides a well-known concert aria, 'O silver moon'. The composer himself set considerable store by his music for the theatre, whether in comic village operas in the manner of Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* or in more ambitious works based on Czech legend.

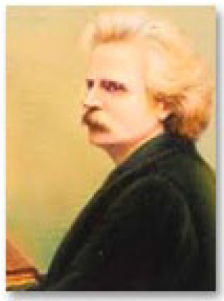
CHORAL MUSIC (Track 6)
Some of Dvořák's choral works were written for the flourishing amateur choral societies of England, in Leeds, Birmingham and London. These include the oratorio *St Ludmilla*, settings of the Mass and Requiem Mass, and a setting of the Te Deum. Earlier choral works include a setting of the *Stabat mater*.

ORCHESTRAL WORKS (Tracks 7-16)
Dvořák wrote nine symphonies, of which the best known must be the Symphony No. 9 'From the New World', written in 1893 and first performed in New York in the same year. Other orchestral works include two sets of *Slavonic Dances*, three *Slavonic Rhapsodies,* numerous overtures and the well-known symphonic poems *The Noonday Witch, The Golden Spinning-Wheel* and *The Wild Dove,* works that seek to explore new ground with their narrative content.

CONCERTOS (Tracks 17-19)
Works for solo instrument and orchestra by Dvořák include an important Cello Concerto, a Violin Concerto and a slightly less well known Piano Concerto. The Romance for solo violin and orchestra and *Silent Woods* for cello and orchestra make interesting and attractive additions to solo repertoire for both instruments.

CHAMBER MUSIC (Tracks 20-24)
Dvořák left 14 string quartets, of which the best known is the so-called 'American' Quartet, No. 12 in F major, written in 1893, the year of the 'New World' Symphony. Of the four surviving piano trios, the fourth, called *Dumky* because of its use of a Bohemian national dance form, is the best known. Dvořák's quintets for piano and strings or strings alone offer further pleasure, as well as the String Sextet and the charming *Terzetto* for two violins and viola.

PIANO MUSIC (Tracks 11, 25-26)
The best known of all the pieces Dvořák wrote for the piano must be the *Humoresque* in G flat major, the seventh of a set of eight. Close to this come the two sets of *Slavonic Dances* for piano duet.



GRIEG, EDVARD (1843–1907)

Edvard Grieg, the greatest of Norwegian composers, was descended on his mother's side from a Norwegian provincial governor and on his father's side from Scottish ancestry. His family provided a musical background. Musicians who visited included the distinguished violinist Ole Bull (1810–1880), who persuaded the Griegs to send their son to Leipzig Conservatory. Here he objected to the dryness of normal piano instruction but he attended concerts and met other musicians, including Arthur Sullivan. Later Grieg moved to Denmark, and in Copenhagen he had encouragement from Niels Gade (1817–1890). The principal influence that was to change his life came from a meeting with Rikard Nordraak, a young Norwegian, who fired him with ambition to seek inspiration in the folk-music of Norway. Grieg prepared himself for employment in his home country. It was a concert arranged by Grieg in Christiania (Oslo) that secured him a position there and provided support for the projected Norwegian Academy of Music, established in 1867. Grieg's efforts (backed by Liszt and the dramatist Bjørnson) to establish a national musical movement in Norway were largely realized. At home he came to occupy a position of honour, and his collaboration with Bjørnson and Ibsen further identified him with the culture of his homeland. He died in 1907.

STAGE WORKS (Tracks 27-28)
Grieg's music for the stage consists primarily of incidental music. He collaborated with the dramatist Bjørnson in the play *Sigurd Jorsalfar*, for which he provided such music, and still more notably with Ibsen in *Peer Gynt* (from which the famous 'Morning' and 'In the Hall of the Mountain King' are excerpted).

CONCERTOS (Track 29)
Grieg wrote just one complete piano concerto, his Op. 16 in A minor, completed in 1868, but it is one of the most famous of all Romantic piano concertos. Its introductory flourish is instantly recognisable, and it is often compared to Robert Schumann's piano concerto in the same key.

CHAMBER MUSIC (Tracks 30-34)
Grieg's three violin sonatas remain a part of standard Romantic repertoire, revealing his mastery of harmonic colour in the clearest of textures. The third of these, in C minor, was completed in 1887 and is particularly striking. Other chamber music includes a String Quartet in G minor, two movements of a String Quartet in F, and his Cello Sonata, written in 1883.

SOLO VOCAL MUSIC (Tracks 35-39)
Grieg wrote 140 songs, many inspired by his wife, a singer. They set a wide variety of texts and form an important element of his music, comparable to other songs of the period in quality and expressiveness.

PIANO MUSIC (Tracks 40-50)
As a pianist himself, Grieg wrote extensively for the piano, excelling, in particular, in his 10 volumes of *Lyric Pieces*, and in other sets of short compositions for the instrument, often derived directly or indirectly from Norwegian folk-music.